

**Jodi Smiley  
on behalf of  
the Montana Library Association**

**House/Senate Interim Committee (Education and Local Government  
Interim Committee)**

**September 8<sup>th</sup> 2016**

Chairman Don Jones and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Jodi Smiley (S M I L E Y). I am the Chief Librarian for the Boulder Community Library, a branch of Jefferson County Library System.

The Boulder Community Library serves a population of 1,900 people. Many of our population have lost jobs with the MDC closure, the mines laying off employees, etc. so they are using the library internet services to look for jobs and work on resumes. The Boulder Library proctors exams for patrons who are continuing their education online. We serve children who are waiting for parents to get off work, so we work closely with our elementary school to ensure the children have a safe space to go after school, and we often offer educational opportunities that help to foster an interest in reading and science.

We are also the county seat of Jefferson County. As such, we also serve many patrons who are in town conducting business at the courthouse and/or court system. The library has become the place the courts send people to file documents online, print out driving records, etc.

Our community has been through many trials and tribulations this year and we put a lot of time and thought into how we could make the best use of our increased per capita monies this year. We decided that we wanted our county to become more united. We felt perhaps one way we could achieve this goal, was to explore how we could provide library services to our outlying communities. We went and talked to the citizens of Basin and asked them what they would like to see done in their community. We tossed around ideas like a "bookmobile" or a satellite library; unfortunately these were not very cost effective ideas. That is



when we decided to place a "Free Little Library" in Basin. We use items that have been donated or we have duplicates of to stock the library. The community held a celebration for the unveiling and threw a party in an effort to get word out to as many community members as they could. One of them even made a wonderful book shaped cake. Many of our Basin residents have come to the Boulder library to express their gratitude for having the "Free Little Library". We have only had to restock the library once in the past five months. Many of the residents are using it to exchange their own books. It is exciting to bridge the gap between the communities. More and more Basin residents are using the Boulder Community Library so it has served a dual purpose in my opinion. Basin has always felt like it was a forgotten part of Jefferson County. When we placed the "Free Little Library" in Basin, it showed them that they were important to the county. It also showed them that Boulder welcomed them, and boy did they welcome us back. They are inviting us into their community like they never have before. Basin School called and wanted to know if I would come to the school once a month to do a story time for the kids and let them know what new programs were happening at the library. Two Basin authors have come to the library to do book talks. A group of talented gardeners have planted and taken care of an "edible garden" in front of the Boulder Library; as well as planted a "pollenating garden" in our parking area. School children from Basin have asked if we could put another "Free Little Library" up containing just children's books because they do not have access to the school library in the summer. I have always believed libraries are the center of our communities and this "Free Little Library" proves it!

We have worked hard to keep our Early Literacy programs fresh and new for our young patrons and their families. To help some of our youngest patrons, we also purchased an AWE Learning Tablet. The early literacy station contains fun, educational games and books for our preschool children through third grade. Parents do not have to worry about whether their children will end up on a website that may not be appropriate for them because the tablets are not connected to the internet. It is wonderful watching the faces of the children as they work out puzzles or try sounding out the words on the screen. We have our local Head Start children take turns playing with the tablet and we also take the tablet to our local daycare for "digital story time". Kids today need to have access to technology at an early age to prepare them for school. I discovered children are now using iPad's in many kindergarten classes for their everyday curriculum. We all want to send our children to school prepared for whatever challenges they



may come across; that is why we need to teach them technology from an early age. Many of our parents cannot afford iPads and do not really want their children out "surfing" the internet, so this is a safe alternative for them.

We have been able to do some really awesome things with the extra money we have received since the per capita increase. Before the per capita increase, we received \$583.17. With the per capita increase, we now receive \$2,244.48. That makes a HUGE difference in the types of programs and technology we can now offer our patrons. I cannot tell you how exciting it is to watch our community come together, learn together, and create together. Libraries are no longer just places where you check out books. Libraries are becoming the centers of our communities and that is due in a large part to the generous increase we have received. You are all making a difference in our libraries and it is my wish that you will continue to help us to grow our libraries.

Thank you all for allowing me to share our story. I have included some photos illustrating some of the changes made possible with the increased funding.

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Boulder Community Library

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